



# Amader Kotha

## The American Center, Dhaka



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## From the Editor's Desk

### আমার(দর) কথা

Dear Readers,

This month's issue of *Amader Kotha* is particularly special for me. Not only is it my first at the editor's desk—and the first issue in quite some time—but the month of July has offered so many opportunities for elaboration on the cooperative friendship between the US and Bangladesh.



First came the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. My personal favorite as far as holidays go, it is of great significance to Americans, celebrating the day our independence was declared. The fight for freedom did not end on 4 July 1776, but that day instead marked the choice of a people to unite in a struggle for liberty. With the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we celebrate the reaffirmation of our most treasured values—freedom, democracy, and the right to life, liberty and happiness. We feel, as evidenced by the Ambassador's remarks (p. 3), that these are ideals that connect Bangladesh and the US, and are a basis for peace and collaboration on a global scale.

Overlapping the 4<sup>th</sup> of July was the arrival of the *USNS Mercy*, a godsend of brave and capable sailors and doctors. The impressive feats of these men and women in uniform become more awe-inspiring each time we review their accomplishments, and each time they move on to bring their goodwill mission to the next stop. In a world rife with conflict, what a relief to see such open and thoughtful cooperation to address the basic needs of a friend and ally.

Tony Morash

Intern, American Center

US Embassy, Dhaka, Bangladesh

## USNS *MERCY* Completes Eight-Day Stay in Bangladesh:

### "Operation Smile" Successful

By Tony Morash

The US Navy medical ship, the *USNS Mercy*, arrived in Bangladesh on Saturday, 1 July, anchoring off the coast of Cox's Bazaar for an eight-day goodwill mission. The ship stopped in Bangladesh as part of a four-nation tour of the Asia-Pacific region. US Army, Navy and Air Force medical personnel led the operation with assistance from doctors of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

The *Mercy* (right) is one of the world's most sophisticated floating hospitals. At 894 feet long, the ship is about ten stories high and has a patient bed capacity of nearly 1000 (below). Newly outfitted and frequently updated, the *Mercy* features four X-ray rooms, a CAT scan unit, a cardio-thoracic angiography suite, an optometry and lens laboratory, a physical therapy and burn care center, an enormous blood bank, and plenty of medicine storage space. Possessing skilled medical personnel of the US Armed Forces and tremendous transport capacity, the ship was last deployed in Southeast Asia in the aftermath of last year's destructive tsunami.



The *Mercy*'s mission statement seems relatively simple: provide

healthcare services to the local people and improve the skills of local medical personnel. It is much easier said than done in just eight days, however. Thanks to an inspiring effort from the crew, and substantial support from Bangladeshis from all walks of life, *Operation Smile* was a remarkable



Medical screenings were conducted by local doctors prior to the ship's arrival. These doctors prioritized cases for the ship's doctors, and, in the end, about 700 people were admitted to CMCH for treatment by the *Mercy* staff. Of these, 200 patients—66 of which were children—underwent surgery for a variety of problems. The most prevalent of these among the children were defective or cleft palates and lips, a specialty of several surgeons on board. 64 patients were taken from CMCH for surgery aboard the *Mercy*. *Mercy* dentists contributed additional services ashore.

In an admirable joint effort, CMCH provided facilities to host the mission on land, and USN helicopters supplied transport to and from the ship's anchorage. The medical personnel of the ship received outstanding assistance from local doctors, and delighted in conducting training and information sessions for their Bangladeshi counterparts.

USN Captain Dennis Amundson related this sentiment at a press conference early in the visit: "The outcomes of this week-long mission would



help usher more durable cooperation between two countries in the field of humanitarian and civic assistance in the future, particularly in healthcare."

US Ambassador Patricia Butenis (left) visited the crew and patients of the *USNS Mercy* on the morning of 4 July, accompanied by the Bangladesh Minister

for Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain. The Ambassador toured the hospital facilities, offered encouragement to patients, and briefly addressed the media, expressing her pride in the work of the US Navy and all medical personnel involved in the operation.

Adding to the exciting atmosphere created by the ship's arrival, the *USNS Mercy* Showband (below) treated the city of Chittagong to a concert on 5 July. "An Evening of American Music" met with great enthusiasm and served as a fitting addition to the mission, bringing smiles to the faces of Bangladeshis young and old.



## American Corners: New Dimension of Old USIS Branch Libraries

By Syed Robiul Bashar, Ph.D.\*

The USIS library started its life and opened its doors to the people of this region in early 1951. In 1955-56, the USIS library became popular all over the country for its branches in Chittagong, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Barisal. Despite a total collection of four thousand books,

these branch libraries were closed in the 1970s. For an entire generation the USIS Libraries came forward confidently with two decades of library service and remained the most popular of libraries among students, teachers, researchers, intellectuals, professionals, political figures and policy makers in Bangladesh. Not everyone remembers only the halcyon days of the USIS libraries; some recall the shock and frustration when the branch libraries closed. However, in the last three years, the people of two major cities, Chittagong and Sylhet, are pleased to see American-style libraries—called American Corners—in their place again. The people of Jessore have also had the opportunity to open an American Corner in the past year.

American Corner branches exist as a partnership between the Public Affairs section of U.S. Embassy and the respective host institution. The American Corners serve as information outposts similar to a public library reference center. Each provides access to current and reliable information about the USA through books, periodicals, video tapes, CDs, DVDs, the Internet and other programming featuring meetings, lecture-discussions, workshops and film showings.

The US Embassy in Russia opened the first American Corner in October 2000 to expand communication and improve information exchange between the United States and Russia. The new conception of a 21<sup>st</sup> century American Library overseas finds its roots in this center, which was equipped with all the modern library facilities to help increase mutual understanding between Russia and the United States. Since that time, around 300 American Corners have opened in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The first American Corner in Bangladesh—also the first American Corner in South Asia—was inaugurated in Chittagong at the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), Chittagong campus, in 2003. The second was inaugurated at the Sylhet International University Campus of Sylhet in 2004, and the third at the Jessore Institute of Jessore in 2005. These American Corners are the Information Resource Center of the U.S. Embassy, Dhaka and provide information services to the community on American history, culture, society, literature, art, government, politics, education, commercial opportunities, and many other subjects. The American Corners are open to the public, but membership is required to access all resources and facilities.

The American Corners are equipped with the latest and most accurate information available from print and electronic media. A collection of several volumes of reference books, print periodicals, CD-ROMs, and videocassettes are available for use. Videos include *Air Force One* and *America's National Parks*. Among the journals are: *Art in America*, *National Geographic*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Futurist*, *Rolling Stone*, *Ms.*, and *The NY Review of Books*.

The reference collection in the Corners includes dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, almanacs, periodicals and other books held especially for consultation. Reference books on TOEFL, GRE, SAT, guides for admission to colleges and universities in the USA are also available. The reference collection is best used in person, but the professional staff also answers queries via telephone, e-mail, fax, or mail. In addition to the print collection, the centers maintain a collection of videocas-



ettes, which patrons may view on one of the Corner's video monitors. The American Corner has a good collection of very resourceful CD-ROMs, the most popular of which are: *Encarta Encyclopedia*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Flash Back Atlas*, *Multimedia of U.S. History*, *The National Gallery of Art*, *World Book Encyclopedia*, *Life in Pioneer America*, and *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*.



To provide faster and more comprehensive service to its patrons, the American Corners offer services through electronic media like the Internet and CD-ROM. Patrons can use these research tools on a Corner's computer. The Corners offer the use of the Internet for research on America and related subjects. A nominal charge is fixed for use of the Internet and printing. Photocopying services are available on a restricted basis for a nominal charge. The American Corners also subscribes to the *International Herald Tribune*.

For information on the American Corners, U.S. policy towards Bangladesh, commercial opportunities, student information, online library services and much more, visit the library of The American Center, House-110, Road-27, Banani, Dhaka-1213, Phone: 880-2-881340-4 or e-mail: [IRCDhaka@state.gov](mailto:IRCDhaka@state.gov) or U.S. Embassy website at: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>

## Ambassador Butenis visits American Corner-Sylhet

By Mirza Hasan



—US Ambassador Patricia Butenis visited the American Corner-Sylhet at the Sylhet International University (SIU) on May 30, 2006.

The Ambassador looked at the book collection and other resources of the Corner

and asked about opening hours, patrons' queries and membership requirements. Ambassador Butenis was joined by the Vice Chancellor of SIU Mr. Sadruddin Ahmed Chowdhury, American Center Deputy Director Dr. Michelle Jones, and SIU faculty members during her visit.

The American Corner-Sylhet was established in 2004 as the 2<sup>nd</sup> American Corner in Bangladesh. It is equipped with American reference books, English language materials, American educational information, documentary films, computers with internet facilities and audio/video equipment. There are about 300 American Corners around the world, three of which are in Bangladesh in

Chittagong, Sylhet and Jessore. An average of 4,000 patrons visit the Corners in Bangladesh each year.

*The United States Embassy celebrates the 230<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of*

## AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

4 JULY, 2006

—THE UNITED STATES EMBASSY and Ambassador



Patricia Butenis hosted an Independence Day reception on the night of 4 July for a number of foreign diplomats, Bangladeshi ministers, members of the press, and employees of the US Embassy. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Morshed Khan (left) was the Chief Guest of the

Ambassador. The Embassy was brilliantly decorated in red, white and blue cloth, and the atrium was adorned with the flags of all fifty states. The US Navy band from the *USNS Mercy* pleased the crowd with lively jazz and patriotic tunes as well.

**“Bangladesh and America are bound by more than just wars of independence from repressive regimes; we are bound by a belief in the rights of the individual, the rights to free speech, freedom of religion and free press, and a dedication to the fundamental principles of democracy. America proudly stands with Bangladesh in our continuing commitment to keep and strengthen our hard-won democracies.” –Ambassador Patricia Butenis**



## Minority Groups Now One-Third of U.S. Population

By Michael Jay Friedman, Washington File Staff Writer

—**The United States Census Bureau** announced this year that as many as one-third of U.S. residents now claim "minority" heritage, reflecting the continuing evolution of an American national identity that transcends ethnic and religious boundaries.

It also raises some interesting questions. Who is a minority, after all? What will "minority" mean in a future America increasingly populated by individuals like the young man who described himself as "an Amer-Asian kid who celebrates Hanukkah with his Jewish stepfather, prays to Buddha with his Buddhist Momma, and then goes to midnight Mass with his Christian father and waits for Santa Claus to come down the chimney?"

Even as Hispanics, Blacks, Asians and American Indian/Alaska natives account for over four-fifths of recent U.S. population growth, the influence that these and other American cultures have on one another continues to develop, in a process as old as the nation itself.

**A History of Diversity.** The thirteen English North American colonies offered refuge for religious dissidents and economic opportunity for individuals seeking a fresh start—not just for subjects of the English Crown, but for ambitious, highly driven individuals from different parts of Europe, and later from nearly every corner of the globe.

While Americans' treatment of dispossessed Native Americans and enslaved African Americans belied our ideals of tolerance and freedom, Americans have for most of their history welcomed large numbers of diverse immigrants and treated them as full-fledged Americans.

Speaking in 1858, two years before his election to the presidency, Abraham Lincoln observed that fully half of that era's Americans were either immigrants, or descendants of those who arrived after the United States achieved independence. These Americans, he said, were "our equals in all things ... and ... they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration [of Independence]."

**Minorities Spur 21<sup>st</sup> Century Growth.** As in Lincoln's day, immigrants and their descendents help drive America's population growth and economic dynamism even as they enrich and enliven its cultural mosaic.

The Census Bureau reports that Hispanics accounted for nearly half of U.S. population growth during the period July 1, 2004–July 1, 2005. The Hispanic population increased by 1.3 million (3.3 percent) during that period, 800,000 by natural increase and 500,000 through immigration.

The Asian American population increased by 421,000 (3 percent) during that period, while Black, American Indian, Alaska native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific islander populations also increased.

As of July 2005, the Census Bureau reports a total U.S. population of 296.4 million. Of this total, Hispanics comprise 42.7 million Americans while blacks, including both African Americans and

more recently arrived Africans and blacks of Caribbean origin, total 39.7 million. The Census identified 14.4 million Asians, 4.5 million American Indians and Alaska natives and nearly 1 million native Hawaiians and Pacific islanders.

"These mid-decade numbers provide further evidence of the increasing diversity of our nation's population," said Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon.

The nation's minority population is younger than the national average. It is thus expected both to contribute to continued economic growth and to help ensure the vitality of public welfare programs serving older Americans.

The Washington Post reported in May 2006 that nearly half of the nation's children under 5 are racial or ethnic minorities.

As the nation's minority population increases, the Census Bureau also reports sharp growth in minority-owned businesses. Even as these entrepreneurs strive to serve their communities' needs, they add to the influence of minority groups on American life.

**The Future: Everyone a Minority?** Future Americans may come to view the very concept of minority groups as a thing of the past. With intermarriage rates high, the American future may come to resemble well-known individuals of mixed racial heritage, like golfer Tiger Woods, actor Keanu Reeves or singer-songwriter Norah Jones. As Gregory Rodriguez, Irvine Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation, writes: "What, when each generation is more racially and ethnically mixed than its predecessor, does race even mean any more?"

Asian ancestry" was too restrictive a definition. It expanded criteria for The 2000 Census was the first to afford Americans the opportunity to identify themselves as "mixed race" or "mixed ethnicity." This was not enough for Sean Lennon, son of English musician John Lennon and Japanese-American Yoko Ono. Lennon has proudly adopted the hapa identity. "I'm not asking for hapa history month, but how about a weekend?" he has written.

**For additional information, see:** ([http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history\\_geography\\_and\\_population/population\\_and\\_diversity.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity.html) ).

(<http://www.census.gov/pubinfo/www/hotlinks.html> ).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

### New American Center Telephone Numbers

883-7150

883-7151

883-7152

883-7153

883-7154



## ***Workshop at the American Corner-Chittagong:***

### ***“Teaching Practices in the ELT Classroom”***

By Syed Robiul Bashar, PhD

—A workshop was organized at the American Corner-Chittagong for the English Language Teachers of Chittagong on 9 May 2006. The program—cosponsored by BELTA and the American Center-Dhaka—was a day-long event for 60 teachers from different schools and colleges in the country, the topic of which was: “Teaching Practices in the ELT Classroom.”

Speakers in the workshop were BELTA President Dr. Arifa Rahman, American Center Deputy Director Dr. Michelle Jones, Ms. Rehana Alam Khan, Mr. Micah Risher, Syed Md. Golam Faruk, Mr. David Pater, Mr. Harunur Rashid Khan and Mr. Richard Boyum.



Dr. Jones gave a presentation titled “America: The Real Story,” while Ms. Khan presented on brainstorming for writing, Mr. Micah on increasing stu-

dent-to-student communication through holistic learning activities, Ms. Rahman on discovering grammar, Mr. Faruk on developing reading strategies, Mr. Pater on how to design an assessment, Mr. Khan on teaching vocabulary, and Mr. Boyum on language learning styles.

## ***Certificate Awarding Ceremony of the P4LYES 2005-2006 Program***

By Mr. Dulal Biswas, Country Director, Nacel Open Door

Last year, 17 Bangladeshi students were selected to participate in the Partnership for Learning Youth Exchange and Study (P4LYES) program sponsored by the US Department of State and implemented by Nacel Open Door. These students have now completed their studies in various American high schools and have returned to Bangladesh.

The successful young students were awarded certificates on the afternoon of 13 July 2006 in the auditorium of the Women’s Voluntary



Association in Dhanmondi. The chief guest of the ceremony was Mr. Lutfor Rahman Khan Azad, member of Parliament, and Honorable State Minister of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment of Bangladesh. Also present as special guests were ex-chairman of BTRC Syed Margub Mrushed, Public Affairs Officer of the US Embassy and Director of the American Center Mr. Jon Cebra, and Mr. Sk. Kaliqueur Rahim, Human Resources Manager of *Bangladesh Today*. Mr. Dulal Biswas, Country Director of Nacel Open Door and Secretary General of the National Federation of Youth Organizations in Bangladesh, delivered the welcome speech. Ms. Nahid Ja-been, of the American Center, delivered a brief address of thanks to the program, which was conducted by YES Alumni Samia Siraj.

Several students shared their experiences in the US at the ceremony. Among them were: Fahad Bin Kamal, Arifur Rahman, Roesky Zafir Bakshi, Saif Alam, Tanvir Hakim, Farhanaz Fatima Reya, Nusrat Zahan, Salma Mishori, Rafatul Bari, Maheen Mahjabeen, and Nisha Chakma.

The P4LYES provides scholarships for secondary school and college students from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the US. The program is vital to expanding mutual understanding and respect between the people of the US and Bangladesh. The students live with host families, attend school, learn about American society and values, acquire leadership skills, and help educate Americans about their countries and cultures.



## ***4<sup>th</sup> of July***



## **2006**

